



Keokuk County Conservation Board News

Winter/Spring 2022

*Serving through education, recreation,
and conservation of our natural resources*

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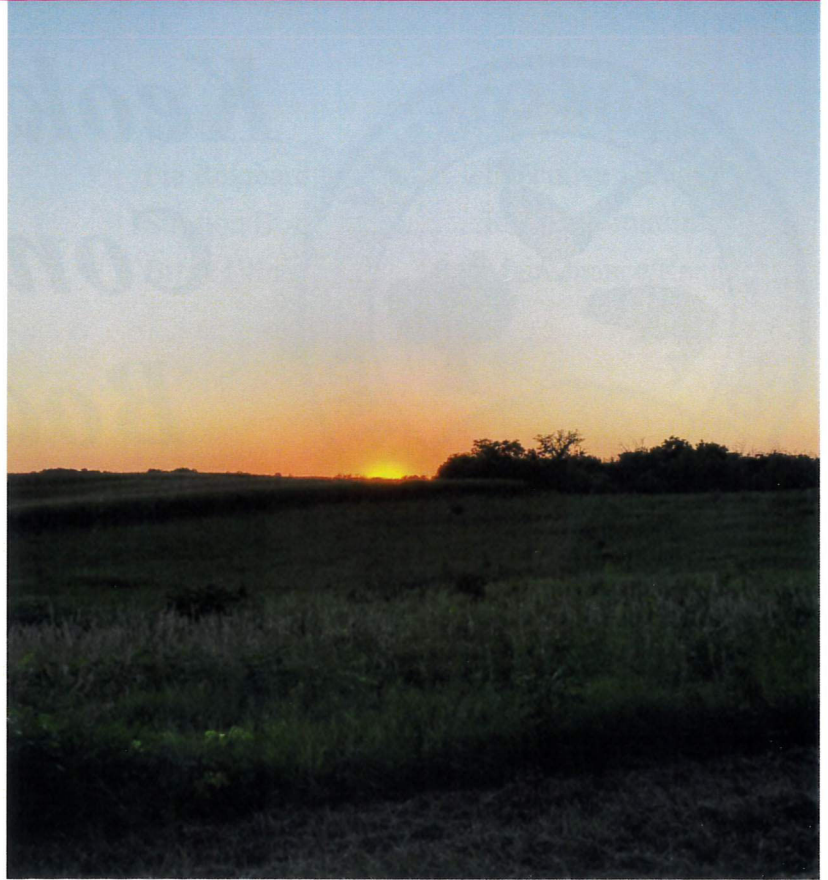


Director's Notes...

I hope everyone has had a good fall and winter and are looking forward to the warmer weather that's sure to come. We have moved snow only three times this year in Belva Deer, which in-turn means less wear and tear on equipment. The board added a John Deere UTV to our equipment inventory last summer and it works wonderfully for snow removal at the cabins while dramatically decreasing overall time spent doing that activity. It really was a perfect winter for us. Low snow amounts and cold weather which produced great, thick, and clear ice on Lake Belva Deer which then attributed to very good cabin rentals during the winter months. Our cabins do very well in overall occupancy when we have good ice, which increase's our yearly revenue in that area of the park. The fall was just as busy due to the warm weather late in the season and campers pushing their outdoor activities right up to the first freeze. The hunting season was busier than the last few years with our public hunting areas being used more than what we've seen in recent years. I assume that is due to the following trend of folks getting back outside which is one positive residual that has come from a pandemic. The continual explosive use of public areas is still being seen at the county, state, and national levels which create a fabulous atmosphere for those of us in the park setting. I would say that this was the best year I've had upland

bird hunting in Belva Deer since the early 2000's during the golden years of Iowa's pheasant season. All in all it has been a tremendous fall and winter in every aspect of life in a park with myself and the staff. We are so much looking forward to another great season at Lake Belva Deer.

Director Pie Reighard



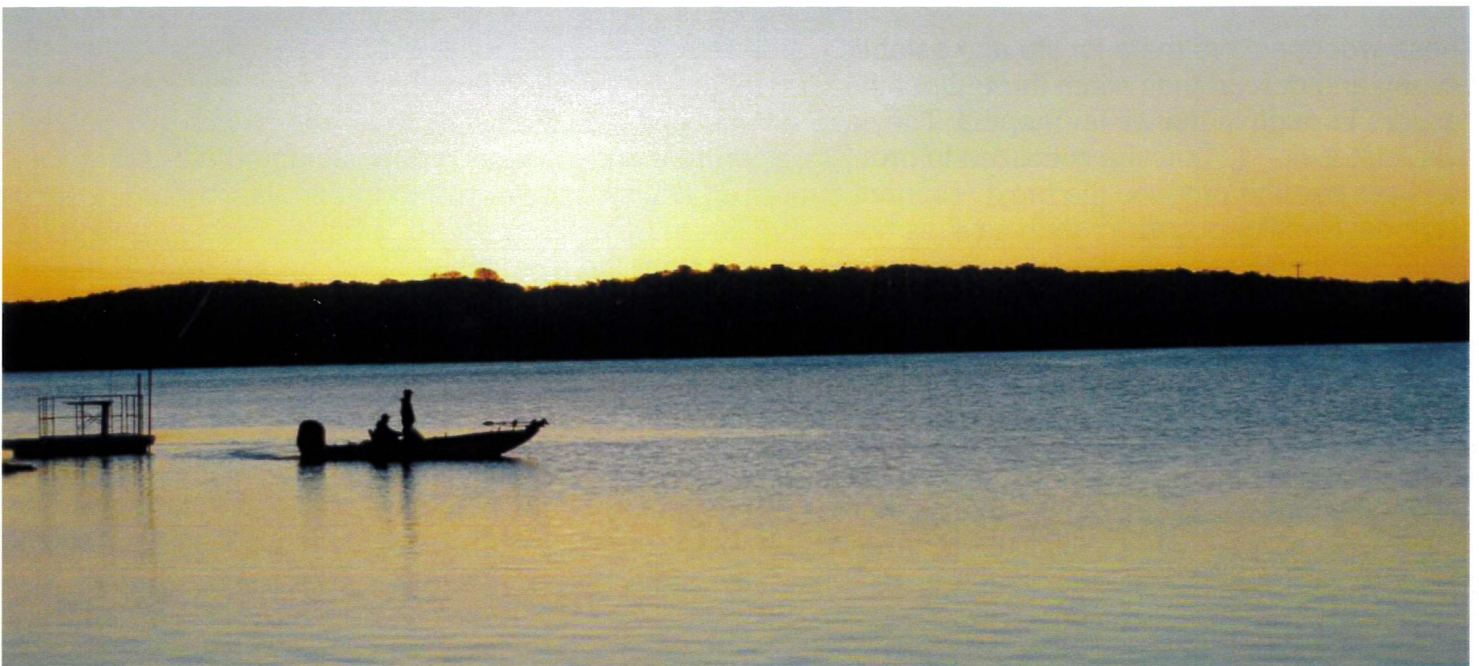
Ranger's Notes

As we find ourselves in this yo-yoing stage of weather where you aren't quite sure if you need a winter coat or shorts and a t-shirt, I start to look towards sure signs of spring to help pass by the last few weeks of winter. A few of my top spring calling cards are hearing the calls of spring peepers and chorus frogs in the distance, turkey vultures starting to soar, you'll see red winged blackbirds perched on fence posts along roadways, families out walking the trails and using the playgrounds, and of course, the most telling sign (and smell) of spring, the 1st "worm rain" we get. I have already begun to see areas of pre-scribed burning, and the agricultural equipment for planting season has been emerging.

I think that this spring will be another one that puts heavy pressure on public outdoor spaces, after a winter that felt like we were getting closer to "normal" but still not quite right, and once the temperatures allow for outdoor recreation, we will begin to get inundated with visitors, campers, and fishing boats. Before we know it, our main park will become a pop-up city on weekends and holidays, with the smell of bacon cooking in the morning over a wood fire floating across the campgrounds, roads will be overtaken by kids on bikes and scooters, and the night air will be filled with the songs of crickets and firefly light shows.

COVID has changed up a lot in life over the past 2 years, it has especially changed the way people use public outdoor spaces. I read a passage from a study out of Pennsylvania in the journal *Land* that really stuck out to me. Results from research that was led by Penn State's Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management in collaboration with the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, showed that nearly half of adults across the United States now participate in outdoor recreation on at least a monthly basis. Approximately 20% may be new to outdoor recreation during the pandemic, meanwhile, more than 13% of Americans ceased participation in outdoor recreation during the same time period. We have always had "regulars" that walk on our roads and trails frequently and in a few cases daily. However since the beginning of the pandemic I have noticed those numbers rising, overall I think this is a positive, staying physically active is an easy way to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and we get to showcase our beautiful park to anyone who wishes to see it.

Ranger Stratton Bond



PILEATED WOODPECKER *Dryocopus Pileatus*

A few days ago, I noticed that an 8 inch Linden tree in my back yard had broken off and laid over about 3 feet above the ground. This was surprising as we had experienced no strong winds. As I approached the tree I noticed a large amount of wood chips around the base, almost as if a chain saw had cut it. As I circled to the back side, it was immediately apparent what had happened. At the point of the break was a large rectangular hole almost a foot long and 3 inches wide, bored through to the center of the tree, weakening it enough to break off. The signature work of a Pileated Woodpecker.



The Pileated Woodpecker is the largest of the North American woodpeckers being about the same size as a crow. It is a keystone old growth associated species and is dependent on mature forests for its core habitat. Perched, it appears almost solid black except for the black, white and red striped head with a brilliant red pointed crest. The crest is mobile and can be raised and lowered to reflect different emotions or moods. Males have a red mustache stripe on their cheek and solid red from the crest to the beak. Females lack the mustache stripe and have a brown patch on their forehead ahead of the crest. Both sexes have large white underwing patches which are visible in flight. Like most woodpeckers, their feet feature 2 forward facing and 2 rearward facing, zygodactyl pattern, toes to aid them in grasping and climbing on trees. For those old enough to remember him, the cartoon character Woody the Woodpecker's appearance was modeled after the Pileated Woodpecker.

This bird favors mature forests and heavily wooded parks featuring large mature hardwood trees. Death and decay means survival for these woodpeckers. The snags, logs and weakened live trees in old growth stands provide the soft wood inhabited by carpenter ants, a favored food. Larger trees are also needed to accommodate the large nesting cavities they excavate. These cavities later benefit other bird and small animal species by providing them with safe and secure shelter. Because of this need it is not surprising that the biggest threat to Pileated Woodpeckers comes in the form of logging and the clean-up of tops and other fallen trees from the forest floor. The removal of invasive species such as honeysuckle and buckthorn is beneficial as it opens up the forest floor allowing better foraging opportunities.

These woodpeckers mate for life and establish large territories approaching 1000 acres in size. They occupy and defend their claim throughout the year as they do not migrate but are tolerant of transient passers through in the winter months. They use a variety of calls, from soft chucks to a louder, repeated, "cuk, cuk, cuk." Drumming is utilized to proclaim a territory and to initiate courtship and mating. Hollow trees are used to produce the most resonant sound, a fairly slow, deep rolling pattern lasting about three seconds. Nesting occurs in deep cavities bored into large diameter trees, 15 to 85 feet above ground level. Wood chips provide the only lining. If an egg falls from the nest, the nest will be abandoned. If a brood is successfully raised, the nest is likewise abandoned and not used in the following year.

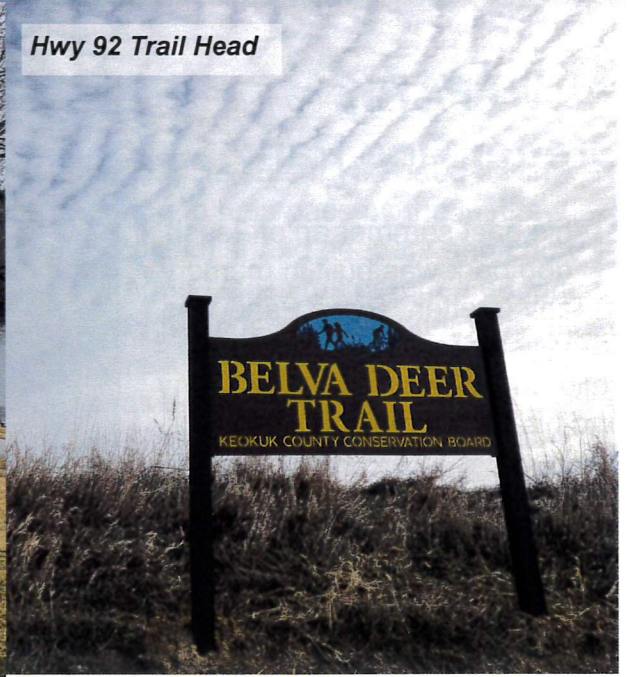
Their diet is omnivorous, switching with the seasons to what is most readily available. When insects and beetle larvae are plentiful, their stout, chisel-like beaks are used to penetrate deeper than most woodpeckers can reach. Woodpeckers have sponge like rear skull bones, a well cushioned brain cavity and minimal cerebrospinal fluid to absorb the impact of striking wood up to 12,000 times a day, preventing brain damage. Many other birds visit and benefit from the feeding areas left behind. Because of the nesting and feeding associations with other bird species, pileated woodpeckers are often carefully monitored to gauge the overall health of an avian ecosystem

Ranger Brian Ulin

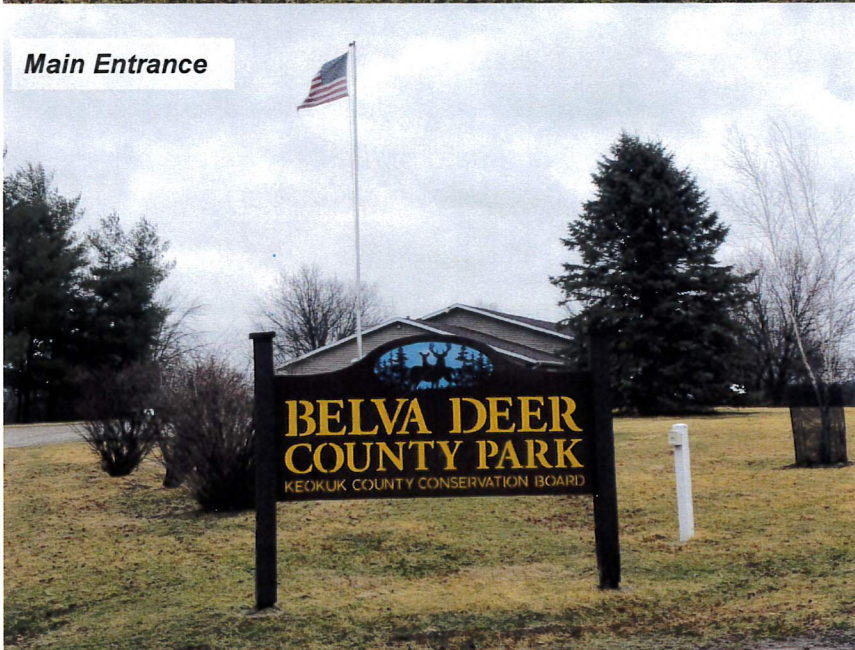
North Side Entrance



Hwy 92 Trail Head



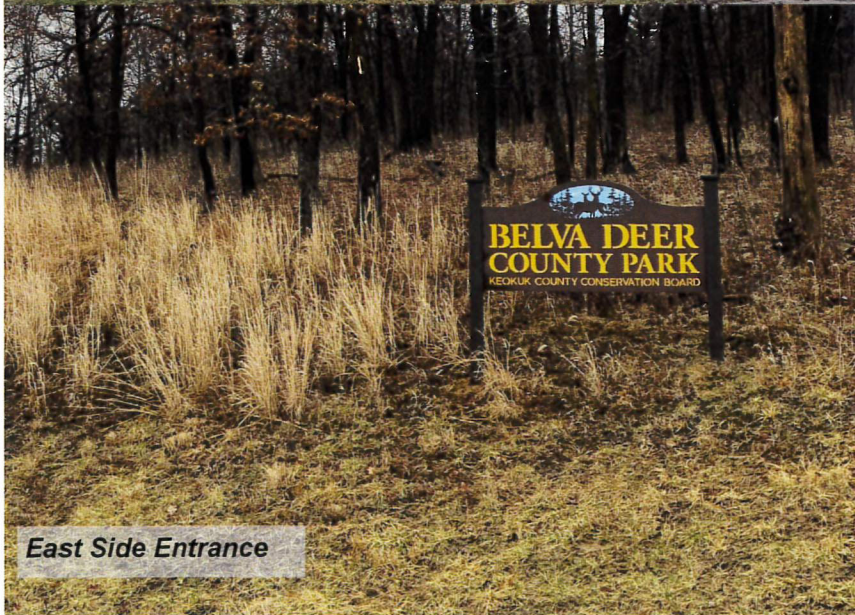
Main Entrance



New Park Signs

The addition of new signage at Belva Deer County Park and HWY 92 trailhead was completed and installed late summer and fall of 2021. The paint and labor was generously donated by Tony and Yvonne Pitsch of Sigourney Body Shop Inc. The paint scheme and colors were made possible by Tony's ingenuity and artistic abilities. Hackert's Wood Products of Richland designed and constructed the signs with Conservation Board staff completing the installation. We cannot thank Sigourney Body Shop enough for their donation and Hackert's Wood products for their support in this project.

East Side Entrance

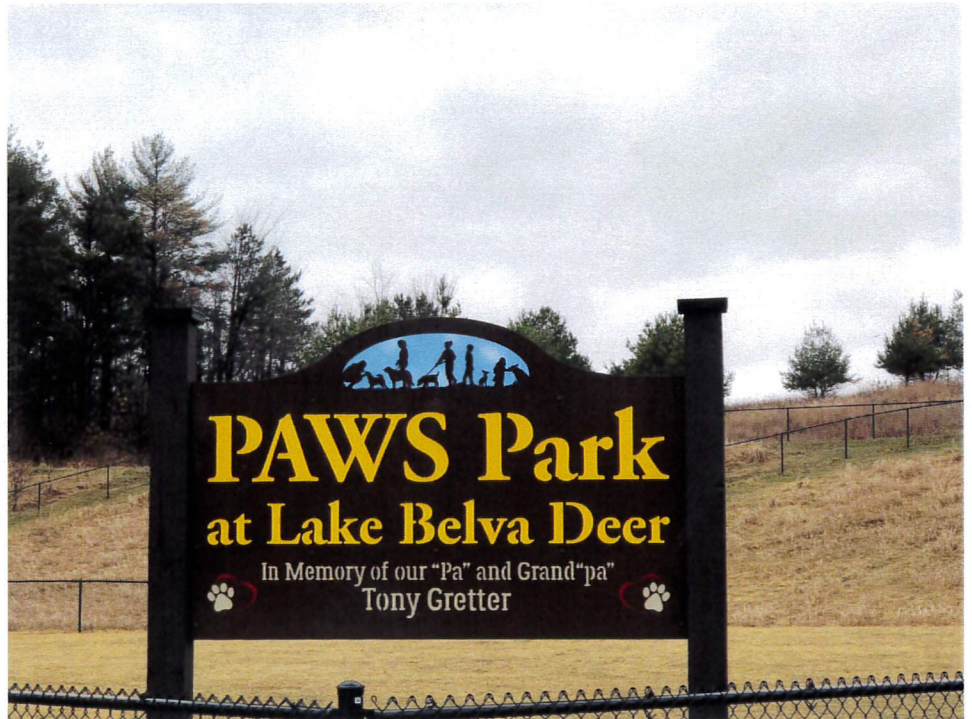


242nd Ave Entrance



PAWS PARK Gretter Dog Park

This past summer an off-leash dog park was built in memory of Tony Gretter. "Paws Park" was the vision of his wife Pam, their children, and grandchildren. Tony and his yellow lab Rosie were constant visitors to Belva Deer, with Pam and Rosie continuing that tradition. Paws Park has two sections, one for large dogs and one for small dogs. Both parks have a waste disposal station and covered bench. Part of each section of the park will be mowed, with another part being left as tall grass on a side hill. The Conservation Board cannot thank Pam and her family enough for the generous and overwhelming addition and memorial to Lake Belva Deer Park. Gestures like this, and people like this are why we choose to live in and call Keokuk County our home. Our best wishes go out to Pam and her family in the upcoming years.



Geode Display

This geode display was constructed and donated by Wayne and Shirley Conkity from Harper. This box is filled with geodes that they have found and collected from across Iowa over the last few years. They cut the rocks open to show the crystal formations on the inside and to aid in the explanation on how geodes are formed. Wayne and Shirley spend quality family time with their grandkids geode hunting and rock collecting.



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- Julie Wohler Sigourney
- Rex Greiner..... South English

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- Stratton Bond.....Ranger/Naturalist
- Brian Ulin.....Maintenance/Ranger

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